

The rules for long s

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Abstract

This article describes the rules for the long s (ſ) in English, French, Italian, and Spanish. It appeared first online in the *BabelStone blog* in 2006, with subsequent updates.

The online PDF contains links to facsimile scans of many of the cited books, many of which are accessible via *Google Book*.

1 Introduction

In a post in my blog about the [grand old trade of basket-making](#) I included several extracts from some 18th century books, in which I preserved the long s (ſ) as used in the original printed texts. This got me thinking about when to use long s and when not. Like most readers of this blog I realised that long s was used initially and medially, whereas short s was used finally (mirroring Greek practice with regards to final lowercase sigma ς and non-final lowercase sigma σ), although there were, I thought, some exceptions. But what exactly were the rules?

Turning first to my 1785 copy of Thomas Dyche's bestselling *A Guide to the English Tongue* (first published in 1709, or 1707 according to some, and reprinted innumerable times over the century) for some help from a contemporary grammarian, I was confounded by his advice that:

The long *f* muſt never be uſed at the *End* of a Word, nor immediately after the ſhort *s*.

Well, I already knew that long s was never used at the end of a word, but why warn against using long s after short s when short s should only occur at the end of a word?

The 1756 edition of Nathan Bailey's *An Universal Etymological English Dictionary* also gives some advice on the use of long s (although this advice does not seem to appear in the 1737 or 1753 editions):

A long *f* muſt never be placed at the end of a word, as *maintainf*, nor a ſhort *s* in the middle of a word, as *conſpires*.

Similarly vague advice is given in James Barclay's *A Complete and Universal English Dictionary* (London, 1792):

All the ſmall Conſonants retain their form, the long *f* and the ſhort *s* only excepted. The former is for the moſt part made uſe of at the beginning, and in the middle of words; and the laſt only at their terminations.

Editor's note: Werner Lemberg transformed the original blog post (with minor modifications) into this paper.

124 THE BLIND BEGGAR

BESSY.

Think on the ſituation I am in; think on my father. Can I leave him, blind and helpleſs, to ſtruggle with infirmity and want, when it is in my power to make his old age comfortable and happy?

S O N G.

*The faithful ſtork behold,
A duteous wing prepare,
It's ſire, grown weak and old,
To feed with conſtant care.
Should I my father leave,
Grown old, and weak, and blind;
To think on ſtorks, would grieve
And ſhame my weaker mind.*

Figure 1: *The Blind Beggar of Bethnal Green* in Robert Dodsley's *Trifles* (London, 1745). In roman typefaces f and f are very similar but are easily distinguished by the horizontal bar, which goes all the way through the vertical stem of the letter 'f' but only extends to the left of the vertical stem of the long s; and in italic typefaces long s is even more clearly distinguished from the letter 'f' as it usually has no horizontal bar at all.

I felt sure that John Smith's compendious *Printer's Grammar* (London, 1787) would enumerate the rules for the letter 's', but I was disappointed to find that although it gives the rules for **R Rotunda**, the rules for long s are not given, save for one obscure rule (see 'Short st ligature after g' below) which does not seem to be much used in practice.

So, all in all, none of these contemporary sources are much help with the finer details of how to use long s. The Internet turns up a couple of useful documents: *Instructions for the proper setting of Blackletter Typefaces* discusses the rules for German Fraktur typesetting; whilst *18th Century Ligatures and Fonts* by David Manthey specifically discusses 18th century English typographic practice. According to Manthey long s is not used at the end of the word or before an apostrophe, before or after the letter 'f', or before the letters 'b' and 'k', although he notes that some books do use a long s before the letter 'k'. This is clearly not the entire story, because long s does commonly occur before both 'b' and 'k' in 18th century books on my bookshelves, including, for example, Thomas Dyche's *Guide to the English Tongue*.

To get the bottom of this I have enlisted the help of *Google Book Search* (see 'Note on methodology' at the end of this article) to empirically check what the usage rules for long s and short s were in printed books from the 16th through 18th centuries. It transpires that the

rules are quite complicated, with various exceptions, and vary subtly from country to country as well as over time. I have summarised below my current understanding of the rules as used in *roman* and *italic* typography in various different countries, and as I do more research I will expand the rules to cover other countries. At present I do not cover the rules for the use of *long s* in *blackletter* or *fraktur* typography, but plan to do so in the future.

2 Rules for long s in English

The following rules for the use of *long s* and *short s* are applicable to books in English, Welsh and other languages published in England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland and other English-speaking countries during the 17th and 18th centuries.

- short s is used at the end of a word (e.g. *his*, *complaints*, *success*)
- short s is used before an apostrophe (e.g. *close'd*, *us'd*)
- short s is used before the letter 'f' (e.g. *satisfaction*, *misfortune*, *transfuse*, *transfix*, *transfer*, *successful*)
- short s is used after the letter 'f' (e.g. *offset*), although not if the word is hyphenated (e.g. *off-fet*)
- short s is used before the letter 'b' in books published during the 17th century and the first half of the 18th century (e.g. *husband*, *Shaftsbury*), but *long s* is used in books published during the second half of the 18th century (e.g. *hufband*, *Shaftsbury*)
- short s is used before the letter 'k' in books published during the 17th century and the first half of the 18th century (e.g. *skin*, *ask*, *risk*, *masked*), but *long s* is used in books published during the second half of the 18th century (e.g. *fskin*, *afk*, *risk*, *masked*)
- Compound words with the first element ending in *double s* and the second element beginning with *s* are normally and correctly written with a dividing hyphen (e.g. *Crofs-flitch*,¹ *Crofs-staff*²), but very occasionally may be written as a single word, in which case the middle letter 's' is written short (e.g. *Crofsstitch*,³ *crofsstaff*⁴).
- *long s* is used initially and medially except for the exceptions noted above (e.g. *song*, *use*, *prefs*, *substitute*)
- *long s* is used before a hyphen at a line break (e.g. *necef-fary*, *pleaf-ed*), even when it would normally be a *short s* (e.g. *Shaftf-bury* and *huf-band* in a

book where *Shaftsbury* and *husband* are normal), although exceptions do occur (e.g. *Mans-field*)

- short s is used before a hyphen in compound words with the first element ending in the letter 's' (e.g. *crofs-piece*, *crofs-examination*, *Prefs-work*, *bird's-neft*)
- *long s* is maintained in abbreviations such as *f.* for *substantive*, and *Genef.* for *Genesis* (this rule means that it is practically impossible to implement fully correct automatic contextual substitution of *long s* at the font level)

Usage in 16th and early 17th century books may be somewhat different – see 'Rules for long s in early printed books' below for details.

3 Rules for long s in French

The rules for the use of *long s* in books published in France and other French-speaking countries during the 17th and 18th centuries are much the same as those used in English typography, but with some significant differences, notably that *short s* was used before the letter 'h'.

- short s is used at the end of a word (e.g. *ils*, *hommes*)
- short s is used before an apostrophe (e.g. *s'il* and *s'eft*)
- short s is used before the letter 'f' (e.g. *satisfaction*, *toutesfois*)
- short s is used before the letter 'b' (e.g. *presbyter*)
- short s is used before the letter 'h' (e.g. *deshabiller*, *deshonnête*)
- *long s* is used initially and medially except for the exceptions noted above (e.g. *fans*, *est*, *substituer*)
- *long s* is normally used before a hyphen at a line break (e.g. *lef-quels*, *paf-fer*, *déf-honneur*), although I have seen some books where *short s* is used (e.g. *les-quels*, *pas-fer*, *dés-honneur*)
- short s is normally used before a hyphen in compound words (e.g. *tres-bien*), although I have seen *long s* used in 16th century French books (e.g. *treff-bien*)
- *long s* is maintained in abbreviations such as *Genef.* for *Genesis*

4 Rules for long s in Italian

The rules for the use of *long s* in books published in Italy seem to be basically the same as those used in French typography:

- short s is used at the end of a word
- short s is used before an apostrophe (e.g. *s'informaffero*, *fufs'egli*)
- short s is used before an accented vowel (e.g. *pafsò*, *ricusò*, *sù*, *sì*, *così*), but not an unaccented letter (e.g. *paffo*, *fi*)

¹ *A Critical Enquiry into the Present State of Surgery* (1754), p. 286.

² *Epitome of the Art of Navigation* (1770), p. 262.

³ *The Spectator*, No. 377 (13th May 1712), in *Harrison's British Classics* (1786), p. 760.

⁴ *The new and complete dictionary of the English language* (1795), entry for *Jacobstaff*.

- short *s* is used before the letter ‘f’ (e.g. *foddisfare*, *foddisfazione*, *trasfigurazione*, *sfogo*, *sfarzo*)
- short *s* is used before the letter ‘b’ (e.g. *sbaglio*, *sbagliato*)
- long *s* is used initially and medially except for the exceptions noted above
- long *s* is used before a hyphen in both hyphenated words and at a line break (e.g. *restaf-fero*)

The most interesting peculiarity of Italian practice is the use of *short s* before an accented vowel, which is a typographic feature that I have not noticed in French books.

In some Italian books I have occasionally seen *double s* before the letter ‘i’ written as *long s* followed by *short s* (e.g. *utilifsima*,⁵ but on the same page as *compreffioni*, *proffima*, etc.). And in some 16th century Italian books *double s* before the letter ‘i’ may be written as a *short s* followed by a *long s*. See ‘[Rules for long s in early printed books](#)’ below for details.

5 Rules for long s in Spanish

It has been a little more difficult to ascertain the rules for *long s* in books published in Spain as Google Book Search does not return many 18th century Spanish books (and even fewer Portuguese books), but I have tried to determine the basic rules from the following three books :

- *Estragos de la Luxuria* (Barcelona, 1736), see figure 2
- *Autos sacramentales alegoricos, y historiales del Phenix de los Poetas el Espanol* (Madrid, 1760)
- *Memorias de las reynas catholicas* (Madrid, 1770)

From these three books it appears that the rules for Spanish books are similar to those for French books, but with the important difference that (in both *roman* and *italic* type) the sequence *fs* (not a ligature) is used before the letter ‘i’, whereas the sequence *ff* is used before all other letters (e.g. *illuftrifsimos* but *confeffores*):

In summary, the rules for Spanish books are:

- short *s* is used at the end of a word
- short *s* may be used before an accented vowel (e.g. *sí*, *sì*, *sé*, *sè*, *Apostasia*, *Apostasia*, *abrasò*, *pafsò*), but not an unaccented letter (e.g. *fi*, *fe*, *paffo*)
- short *s* is used before the letter ‘f’ (e.g. *transfor-mandofe*, *transfigura*, *satisfaccion*)
- short *s* is used before the letter ‘b’ (e.g. *presbytero*)
- short *s* is used before the letter ‘h’ (e.g. *deshonestos*, *deshonestidad*)
- short *s* is used after a *long s* and before the letter ‘i’ (e.g. *illuftrifsimo*, *pafsion*, *confeffion*, *posfible*),

⁵ *Opere di Ambrogio Bertrandi* (1787), p. 77.

Desfo, que este pequeño Libro, firva también para el desvelo, y cuydado de los Padres de Familia; de los Ayos, y Maestros de sus hijos; de los Señores Confesores; de los Ministros de Justicia; y de los Ilustrísimos Señores Obispos, y Prelados; à fin de que cada uno trabaje, en lo que respectivamente le toca; para que este Vicio Capital, y pestilente, no se defafluere mas; y se quiten los escandolos, que destruyen à los Pueblos Christianos.

Figure 2: *Estragos de la Luxuria* (Barcelona, 1736).

but double *long s* is used before any letter other than the letter ‘i’ (e.g. *exceffo*, *comiffario*, *neceffaria*, *paffa*)

- long *s* is used initially and medially except for the exceptions noted above
- long *s* is used before a hyphen in both hyphenated words and at a line break, even when it would normally be a *short s* (e.g. *tranf-formados*, *copiofif-fimo*)

As with Italian books, Spanish books usually use a *short s* before an accented vowel, although from the three books that I have examined closely it is not quite clear what the exact rule is. For example, *Memorias de las reynas catholicas* consistently uses *short s* before an accented letter ‘i’ (e.g. *si*), but consistently uses a *long s* before an accented letter ‘o’ (e.g. *paffò*, *cafò*, *precifò*, *Cafòle*); whereas *Estragos de la Luxuria* uses *short s* before both an accented letter ‘i’ (e.g. *si*) and an accented letter ‘o’ (e.g. *abrasò*, *pafsò*).

6 Rules for long s in other languages

Other languages may use rules different from those used in English and French typography. For example, my only early Dutch book, Simon Stevin’s *Het Burgerlyk Leven [Vita Politica]* (Amsterdam, 1684) follows the German practice of using *short s* medially at the end of the elements of a compound word (e.g. *misverstant*, *Rechtsgelerden*, *wisconftige*, *Straatsburg*, *Godsdiensten*, *misgaan*, *boosheyt*, *dusdonig* and *misbruyk*).

7 Rules for long s in early printed books

In 16th century and early 17th century books printed in *roman* or *italic* typefaces (as opposed to *blackletter*) the rules for the use of *long s* may be slightly different to those enumerated above. For example, in *italic* text it was common to use a ligature of *long s* and *short s* (ß) for double-s, whereas a double *long s* ligature was normally used in *roman* text. This can be seen in figure 3 which shows an extract from an English pamphlet published in 1586, which has the words *witneße*, *aßuring*, *thankfulneße*, *goodneße* and *bleßings*. But in that part of the same pamphlet that is set in *roman* typeface

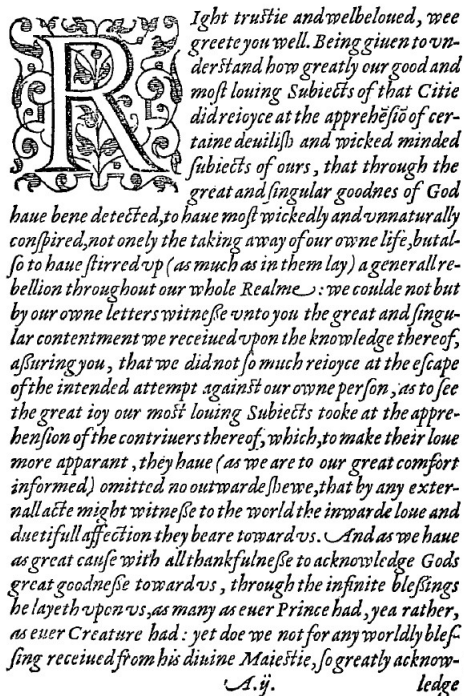


Figure 3: *The True Copie of a Letter from the Queenes Maiestie* (London, 1586), p. A.ii.

Now forasmuch as Gods blessings wonderfully abound, and one ioye comes vpon another, let vs not be vnthankfull to God, but acknowledge his goodnesse, and attribute the same (as in deede we ought) to the sincere Religion of Almighty God, most godly established by the Queenes most excellent

Figure 4: *The True Copie of a Letter from the Queenes Maiestie* (London, 1586), p. A.ii.

the words ‘blessings’ and ‘goodnesse’ are written with a double *long s* ligature, as shown in figure 4.

Figure 5 shows a French book published in 1615 which has *Confessions* in italic type, but ‘confession’ in roman type.

This ligature is still occasionally met with in a word-final position in italic text late into the 17th century, for example in this page from Hooke’s *Micrographia* (figure 6), which has this example of the word *Adress*, although unligatured *long s* and *short s* are used elsewhere at the end of a word (e.g. *smalness*) as well as occasionally in the middle of a word (e.g. *afsifted*, alongside *affistances*) in italic text.

Another peculiarity that is seen in some 16th century Italian books is the use of *short s* before *long s* medially before the letter ‘i’, but double *long s* before any other letter; see figure 7.

Pour les Confessions.
C’est affaire est de tres grande importance. Car pour y auoir des pechez referuez aux superieurs, quelques vns de la Compagnie demeurent cinq & six ans en peché mortel, commettans mille sacrileges, sans offer se confesser au superieur & confesseur ordinaire, à cause que le superieur n’en donne la permission, ou s’il la donne c’est avec grande difficulté & avec tant de fortes de demandes & questions, que le seu de la confession court fortune d’estre manifesté.

Figure 5: *Advis de ce qu’il y a à réformer en la Compagnie des Jésuites* (1615), p. 13.

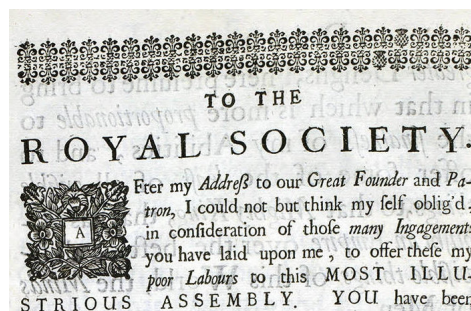


Figure 6: *Micrographia* (London, 1665), p. 13.

infinitamente. Al che hauendo poi auuertito infiniti sapienti del mondo, & conoscendo ueramente, quanta sia la grandezza, & l’utilità di questa facultà diuina, inuaghiti dalla amenità, & dolcezza sua, si posero à contemplare con continuo studio ogni bella, & necessaria parte di quella; & quella spertalmente che narra, & insegna la facultà marauigliosa delle piante. Del che ce ne fanno amplissima fede Pittagora, Aristotele, Theophrasto, Democrito, Zoroastre, Xenophonte, Amphiloco, Atheneo, Hipparco, Aristomacho, Philisthene, Apollodoro, Aristandro, Bione, Agarhocle, Diodoro, Diocle, Epigene, Euagora, Prassagora, Erasiftrato, Metrodoro, Hicéfio, Pamphilo, Mantia, Herophilo, Hippocrate, Crateua, Dioscoride fra tutti gli altri celeberrimo, Galeno, Plinio, & altri infiniti antichi, i nomi de i quali per breuità trapasso. Imperoche costoro accessi dalla giocondità, nobiltà, & grandezza di questa utilissima scienza, dall’ardore di giouare alla posterità uniuersale, & dal disio d’acquistarsi una fama perpetua, & immortale, non si sgomentano di porre la propria uita in molti, & uarij pericoli, mentre che facendo smiturati pelegrinaggi, & nauigando lungchissimi mari, face uano ogni estrema fatica, & diligenza di poter conseguire la uera, & legitima cognitione de i semplici, & di farsi anchor essi ritrouatori di molti per auanti non conosciuti. Che senza dubbio sia uero, che la scienza, & facultà delle piante, & parimente il ritrouarne di noue, oltre all’utilità, & piacer grande, che se ne prende l’animo, apportino lodi immortali, & perpetua fama, lo conobbero non solamente tutti i primi sapienti del mondo, diligentissimi inuestigatori delle cose; ma anchora molti magnanimi, & potentissimi Re di Corona. percioche marauigliandosi della chiarezza del nome di

Figure 7: *I Discorsi di M. Pietro And. Matthioli* (Venice, 1563). Note the words *amplissima*, *utilissima*, *longhissimi*, *diligentissimi*, etc., but *potentissimi* at the end of the second to last line; cf. *necessaria*, *Prassagora*, *trapasso*.

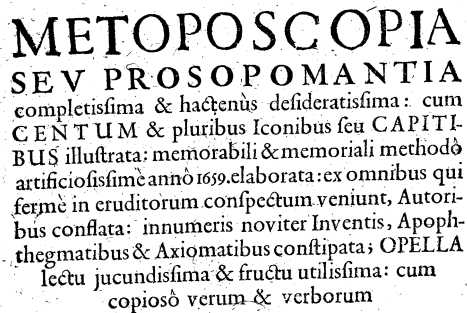


Figure 8: Title page to *Metoposco피아* (Leipzig, 1661). Note the words *completissima*, *defideratissima*, *artificiosissime*, *jucundissima*, *utilissima*.

This typographic feature can also be seen in some later books (as shown in figure 8), though I am not yet sure how widespread it was.

8 Short s before and after f

In 17th and 18th century English and French typography the main exceptions to the rule that *short s* is not used at the start of a word or in the middle of a word is that *short s* is used next to a letter ‘f’ instead of the expected *long s* (so *miffortune* and *offset*, but never *mifffortune* or *offfet*). The reason for this must be related to the fact that the two letters *f* and *f* are extremely similar, although as the combination of the two letters does not cause any more confusion to the reader than any other combination of *long s* and another letter (the combinations *fl* and *fl* are far more confusable) it does not really explain why *long s* should be avoided before or after a letter ‘f’, other than perhaps for aesthetic reasons. In all probability the rule is inherited from *blackletter* usage, as is evidenced by the 1604 pamphlet shown in figure 9 about a mermaid that was sighted in Wales, which has *fatisfaction*.

Whatever the reasons, this is an absolute rule, and Google Book Search only finds a handful of exceptions from the 17th and 18th century, most probably typographical errors (or in the case of the Swedish-English dictionary due to unfamiliarity with English rules):

- *mifffortune* in *Anglorum Speculum* (London, 1684) [but *misfortune* elsewhere]
- *fatiffie* and *fatiffied* in *The Decisions of the Lords of Council and Session* (Edinburgh, 1698)
- *mifffortune* in *The annals of the Church* (London, 1712) [but *misfortune* elsewhere]
- *mifffortune* in *An Historical Essay Upon the Loyalty of Presbyterians* (1713) [but *misfortune* elsewhere]
- *fatiffaction* in *An Enquiry Into the Time of the Coming of the Messiah* (London, 1751) [but on the same page as *fatisfied*]
- *mifffortune* in *Svenskt och engelskt lexicon* (1788)

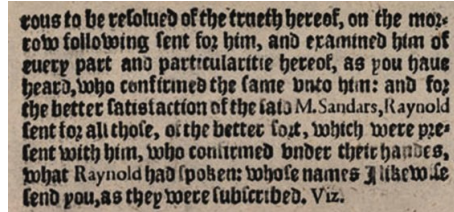


Figure 9: 1604 pamphlet about a mermaid.

Similarly, Google Book Search finds 628 French books published between 1700 and 1799 with *fatisfaction* but only two books with *fatiffaction*.

9 Short s before b and k

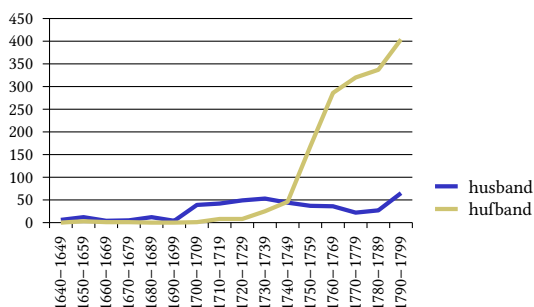
As a general rule English books published in the 17th century and the first half of the 18th century have a *short s* before the letters ‘b’ and ‘k’ (so *husband* and *ask*), whereas books published during the second half of the 18th century have a *long s* (so *husband* and *ask*). This is not a hard and fast rule, as it is possible to find examples of books from the 17th and early 18th century that show *husband* and *ask*, but they are few and far between. For example, whereas Google Book Search finds 138 books published between 1600 and 1720 with *husband*, Google Book Search only finds nine *genuine* books from this period that have *husband* (excluding false positives and hyphenated *huf-band*), and in almost all cases *husband* is not used exclusively :

- *The Dutch Courtezan* (London, 1605) [mostly *husband* but a couple of instances of *husband*]
- *The breast-plate of faith and love* (London, 1651) [mostly *husband* but one instance of *husband*]
- *Tryon’s Letters, Domestick and Foreign, to Several Persons of Quality* (London, 1700)
- *The Present State of Trinity College in Cambridge* (London, 1710) [mostly *husband* but one instance of *husband*]
- *Dialogue between Timothy and Philatheus* (London, 1711) [one instance each of *husband* and *huf-band*]
- *The Universal Library; Or, Compleat Summary of Science* (1712) [two instances of *husband*]
- *The Works of Petronius Arbiter* (London, 1714) [mixture of both *husband* and *husband*]
- *Letters Writ by a Turkish Spy* (London, 1718) [mostly *husband* but a couple of instances of *huf-band*]
- *An Historical Essay Concerning Witchcraft* (London, 1718) [mostly *husband* but one instance of *huf-band*]

Likewise, it is possible to find books from the late 18th century that use *long s* but show *husband* and *ask*,

Date	husband	hufband	ask	afk	presbyter(e)	prefbyter(e)
1640-1649	6	0	4	0	1	0
1650-1659	12	3	12	1	1	0
1660-1669	4	1	10	2	1	0
1670-1679	5	1	10	1	0	1
1680-1689	12	0	22	0	3	0
1690-1699	4	0	5	0	2	0
1700-1709	39	1	54	0	3	0
1710-1719	42	8	74	7	8	2
1720-1729	49	8	78	11	7	1
1730-1739	53	25	87	36	13	1
1740-1749	44	46	50	66	11	0
1750-1759	37	168	43	201	12	2
1760-1769	36	286	30	307	11	2
1770-1779	22	320	21	342	26	5
1780-1789	27	337	21	368	37	1
1790-1799	65	404	71	464	21	1

Table 1: Change of spellings.

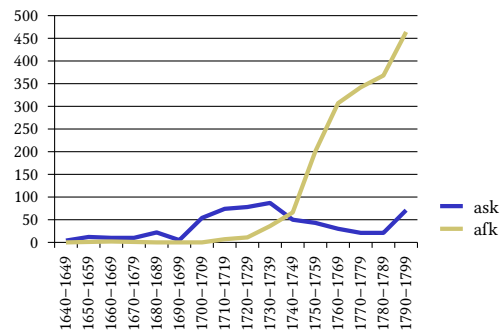
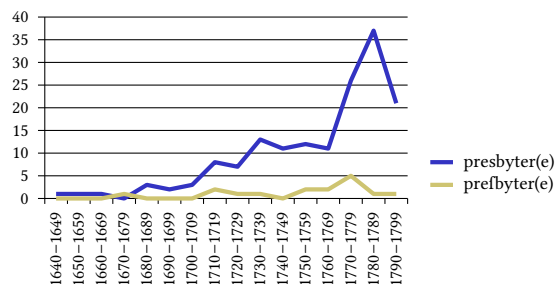
Figure 10: *husband* vs. *hufband* 1640–1799.

but these are relatively few in number. For example, whereas Google Book Search finds 444 books published between 1760 and 1780 that have *hufband*, it only finds 60 that have *husband* (excluding false positives on *HUSBAND*).

The results of Google Book Search searches on the two spellings of *husband* and *ask* (as well as *presbyter(e)* in French books) from 1640 to 1799 are shown in table 1 in ten-year segments (matches for *HUSBAND* and *ASK* have been discounted, but otherwise figures have not been adjusted for false positives such as *huf-band*).

The change in the usage of *short s* to *long s* before ‘b’ and ‘k’ appears even more dramatic if these figures are plotted on a graph, as displayed in figures 10 and 11.

But for French books, no change in rule occurred in the middle of the century, and *short s* continued to be used in front of the letter ‘b’ throughout the 18th century, as can be seen from the distribution of the words *presbyter(e)* and *prefbyter(e)* in figure 12.

Figure 11: *ask* vs. *afk* 1640–1799.Figure 12: *presbyter(e)* vs. *prefbyter(e)* 1700–1799.

So why then did the change in rule for ‘s’ before ‘b’ and ‘k’ happen in England during the 1740s and 1750s? According to John Smith’s *Printer’s Grammar*, p. 45, the Dutch type that was most commonly used in England before the advent of the home-grown typefaces of William Caslon did not have ‘fb’ or ‘fk’ ligatures, and that it was Caslon who first cast ‘fb’ and ‘fk’ ligatures. So with the growth in popularity of Caslon’s typefaces ligatured ‘fb’ and ‘fk’ took the place of ‘sb’ and ‘sk’ – but further research is required to confirm to this hypothesis.

As to why this rule (as well as the French rule of *short s* before ‘h’) developed in the first place, I suspect that it goes back to *blackletter* usage, but that is something for future investigation (all I can say at present is that *Caxton’s Chaucer* (1476, 1483) seems to use *long s* before the letters ‘f’, ‘b’ and ‘k’). It is perhaps significant that the letters ‘b’, ‘k’ and ‘h’ all have the same initial vertical stroke, but quite what the significance of this is I am not sure.

10 Short s before h

French and English typographic practice differs in one important respect: French (and also Spanish) typography uses a *short s* before the letter ‘h’, whereas English typography uses a *long s*.

For example, Google Book Search finds 86 books with *déshabiller* or its various grammatical forms (*déshabillé*, *déshabillée*, *déshabille*, *déshabilles*, *déshabillez*

or *déshabillant*) during the period 1700–1799, but only a single book that uses *long s*: *déshabillé* occurs three times in *Appel a l'impartiale postérité, par la citoyenne Roland* (Paris, 1795).

On the other hand, for the period 1640–1799 Google Books finds 54 books with *dishonour* and 196 books with *difhonour*, but closer inspection shows that almost every single example of *dishonour* in pre-1790 books is in fact *difhonour* or *DISHONOUR* in the actual text. Similar results were obtained when comparing the occurrences of *worship* and *worship*. Thus it seems that *short s* was not used before the letter ‘h’ in English typography.

11 Short st ligature after g

According to John Smith’s *The Printer’s Grammar*, first published in 1755, there is a particular rule for *italic* text only: that a short st-ligature is used after the letter ‘g’ in place of a long st-ligature (p. 23–24):

In the mean time, and as I have before declared; Italic discovers a particular delicacy, and shews a mathematical judgement in the Letter-cutter, to keep the Slopings of that tender-faced Letter within such degrees as are required for each Body, and as do not detriment its individuals. But this precaution is not always used; for we may observe that in some Italics the lower-case g will not admit another g to stand after it, without putting a Hair-space between them, to prevent their pressing against each other: neither will it give way to *f* and the ligature *ft*; and therefore a round *st* is cast to some Italic Founts, to be used after the letter g; but where the round *st* is wanting an *st* in two pieces might be used without discredit to the work, rather than to suffer the long *ft* to cause a gap between the g and the said ligature.

However, I have thus far been unable to find any examples of this rule in practice. For example, Google Book Search finds several examples of *Kingston* in *italic* type, but no examples of *Kingston* in books that use a *long s*:

- *An Universal, Historical, Geographical, Chronological and Poetical Dictionary* (London, 1703)
- *Athenæ Britannicæ, or, A Critical History of the Oxford and Cambridge Writers and Writings* (London, 1716), p. 322
- *The History of England* (London, 1722), p. 78
- *Scanderbeg: Or, Love and Liberty* (London, 1747), p. 92
- *An Introduction to the Italian Language* (London, 1778), p. 109
- *A Collection of Treaties* (London, 1790), p. 288

12 The demise of the long s

Long s was used in the vast majority of books published in English during the 17th and 18th centuries, but suddenly and dramatically falls out of fashion at the end

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To raise the Art of Printing in this country from the neglected state in which it had long been suffered to continue, and to remove the opprobrium which had but too justly been attached to the late productions of the English press, much has been done within the last few years; and the warm emulation which has discovered itself amongst the Printers of the present day, as well in the remote parts of the kingdom as in the metropolis, has been highly patronized by the public in general. The present volume, in addition to the SHAKESPEARE, the MILTON, and many other valuable works of elegance, which have already been given to the world, through the medium of the Shakspeare Press, are particularly meant to combine the various

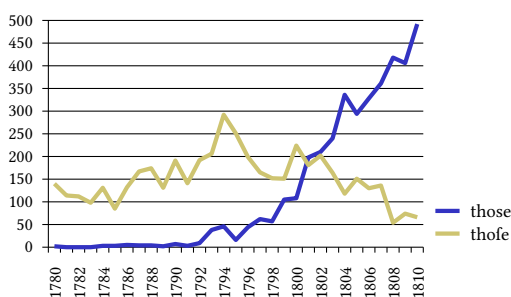
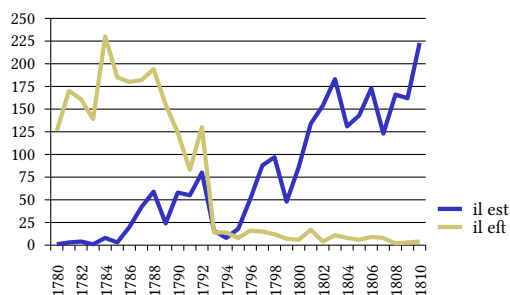
Figure 13: William Martin’s *f*-free typeface.

of the 18th century, reflecting the widespread adoption of new, modern typefaces based on those developed by Bodoni and Didot during the 1790s. In England this movement was spearheaded by the printer William Bulmer, who set the benchmark for the new typographical style with his 1791 edition of *The Dramatic Works of Shakspeare*, printed using a typeface cut by William Martin. The *f*-free typeface used by Bulmer can be seen in the Advertisement to his 1795 edition of *Poems by Goldsmith and Parnell* (figure 13).

Although throughout most of the 1790s the vast majority of English books continued to use *long s*, during the last two or three years of the century books printed using modern typefaces started to become widespread, and in 1801 *short s* books overtook *long s* books. The rise of *short s* and decline of *long s*, as measured by the occurrences of the word *those* compared with *thofe* in Google Book Search, is charted in table 2 and figure 14.

The death knell for *long s* was finally sounded on September 10th 1803 when, with no announcement or any of the fuss that accompanied the typographic reform of October 3rd 1802 (see the articles in the issues of Sept. 26th and 27th 1802), *The Times* newspaper quietly switched to a modern typeface with no *long s* or old-fashioned ligatures, as shown in figure 16 (this was one of several reforms instituted by John Walter the Second, who became joint proprietor and exclusive manager of *The Times* at the beginning of 1803).

Date	those	thofe	il est	il eft
1780	2	140	1	126
1781	0	114	3	170
1782	0	112	4	161
1783	0	98	1	139
1784	3	131	8	230
1785	3	85	3	185
1786	5	132	20	180
1787	4	167	42	182
1788	4	174	59	194
1789	2	131	24	155
1790	7	191	58	124
1791	3	141	55	83
1792	9	192	80	130
1793	38	206	16	14
1794	46	292	8	14
1795	16	251	18	8
1796	44	199	51	16
1797	62	165	88	15
1798	57	152	97	12
1799	105	151	48	7
1800	108	224	86	6
1801	198	181	134	17
1802	210	202	154	4
1803	240	164	183	11
1804	336	118	131	8
1805	294	151	143	6
1806	328	130	173	9
1807	361	136	123	8
1808	418	54	166	2
1809	406	74	162	3
1810	492	66	223	4

Table 2: *those* vs. *thofe* and *il est* vs. *il eft*.Figure 14: *those* vs. *thofe* 1780–1810.Figure 15: *il est* vs. *il eft* 1780–1810.

By the second half of the 19th century *long s* had entirely died out, except for the occasional deliberate antiquarian usage (for example, my 1894 edition of *Coridon's Song and Other Verses* uses *long s* exclusively in a medial position, with *short s* in both initial and final positions).

As might be expected, the demise of *long s* in France seems to have occurred a little earlier than in England. Based on the following Google Book Search data for *il est* and *il eft*, it seems that *short s* started to gain popularity from the mid 1780s, and *long s* had been almost completely displaced by 1793, as shown in table 2 and figure 15 (many of the post-1792 examples of *long s* are from books published outside France).

13 Note on methodology

The statistics given here are based on the results returned from searches of Google Book Search (filtering on the appropriate language and ‘Full view only’), which allows me to distinguish between words with *long s* and words with *short s* only because the OCR software used by Google Book Search normally recognises *long s* as the letter ‘f’, and so, for example, I can find instances of *hufband* by searching for ‘hufband’. However, for a number of reasons the results obtained are not 100% accurate.

Firstly, the search engine does not allow case-sensitive searches, so whereas searching for ‘hufband’ only matches instances of *hufband*, searching for ‘husband’ matches instances of both *husband* and *HUSBAND*, which skews the results in favour of *short s*.

Secondly, hyphenated words at a line break may match with the corresponding unhyphenated word, so searching for ‘hufband’ may match instances of *huf-band*, which is not relevant as *long s* is expected before a hyphen (Google Book Search shows 583 matches for *huf-band*, but only 3 for *hus-band* for the period 1700–1799).

Thirdly, *long s* is sometimes recognised by the OCR software as a *short s*, especially when typeset in italics.

Fourthly, the publication date given by Google Book Search for some books is wrong (for various reasons which I need not go into here), which I often found was the explanation for an isolated unexpected result.

Fifthly, when Google Book Search returns more than a page’s worth of results, the number of results may go down significantly by the time you get to the last page.

Finally, and to me this is most perplexing, Google Book Search searches in March 2008 gave me over twice as many matches than in May 2008 using the same search criteria, so, for example, I got 438 matches for ‘husband’ and 956 matches for ‘hufband’ for the period 1790–1799 in March, but only 187 and 441 matches re-

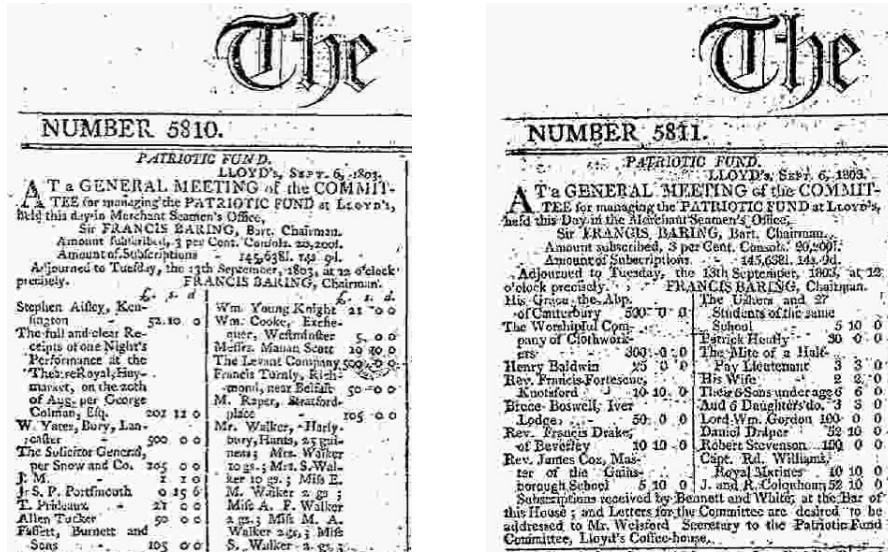


Figure 16: The Times Issues 5810 & 5811 (September 9th and 10th 1803). Compare the words *subscribed/subscribed* and *Tuesday/Tuesday* in the first paragraph.

spectively for the same search when redone in May (nevertheless, the figures for March and May showed exactly the same trends for *husband* versus *husband*). For consistency, the figures shown for 'husband/husband' and 'ask/afk' are those that I obtained in May 2008. (I may try redoing this experiment in a year's time – providing Google Book Search does not improve its OCR software to recognise *long s* in pre-19th century books – and see if the trends for *husband* versus *husband* and *ask* versus *afk* are roughly the same or not.)

14 And finally ...

If you have managed to get this far, you may well be interested in my brief, illustrated history of the *long s* (*The Long and the Short of the Letter S*), which to most people's surprise starts in Roman times.

And if the rules of *long s* are not enough for you, try out my *Rules for R Rotunda* (a post that I think needs some revision when I have the time).

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